

## Essential Skills for Aboriginal Futures ES Programs

ESAF has been delivering Essential Skills (ES) training programs to the urban Aboriginal community in the Greater Vancouver Regional District (GVRD) since June 2007. ES training is core to all programming being delivered. ESAF has run as many as 9 programs per year with an average of 14-16 participants per program.

- ESAF Pre-Technical Trades courses are designed to equip participants with the skills needed to successfully complete advanced technical training. These 8-12-week ES training programs prepare participant to successfully complete technical training at vocational/technique training institutions such as the British Columbia Institute of Technology. ESAF program staff work closely with partnering vocational institutions to determine skills and knowledge ESAF participants will need to meet entry requirements and successfully complete advance training programs. ES curriculum is then developed to reflect the training materials and texts used at partnering vocational training institutions and the skills set and knowledge first year apprentices are required to have.
- Pre technical training program has prepared participants advance technical training in the following: Millwright, Arborist Technician, Carpentry, Pipe Fitting, Metal Fabrication, Machinist, Bridge Watchman, Dental Assistant, Machinist, Construction Safety Officer, IT Technician, Bookkeeping.
- ESAF's Employer Partnership 8 week program trains learners for specific employer- identified occupations with the goal of moving participants directly to employment. Participants receive focused instruction in the Essential Skills most important to the specific occupation for which they are being trained. Needed ES are taught within the context of the specific work tasks associated with each occupation. Again ESAF work closely with employer partners to determine the workplace essential skills, knowledge and attitudes needed for entry into the occupation so that the ES curriculum can be tailored to the skills requirements of

the job. Learners participate in work placements with partnering employers and upon completion learners are provided interviews for prospective hires with the Employer Partner.

- This year ESAF is piloting a 2-month Film Industry training program in partnership with the Indigenous International Film Festival. Participants will learn the film industry by creating their own film which when completed will be shown at the Festival.
- Career X program: An 8-week program

Participants realize how their unique gifts, talents and interests can translate into fulfilling employment. They will gain more focus and clarity about their direction and are able to take a more confident and proactive approach towards their training plan. With a clear plan of action to reach future employment goals.

#### Course Modules

**Career Planning,** Participants engage in activities designed to identify and target a career path. Career exploration includes: researching occupations, salaries and educational requirements and assessments.

**Practical Skills,** Participants explore and apply practical skills for dealing with daily living situations such as managing time, stress and change, work-life balance and self-awareness.

**Essential Skills,** Once the employment goal is established, skill gaps are identified and individual essential skill learning plans designed to increase essential skill abilities.

**Labour Market,** Participants will explore the future labour market trends, learn how to respond to job postings, develop their resume, cover letter and reference list and learn how to make a positive first impression

## Project Details

### Location

British Columbia

### website

<http://accessfutures.com/>

## Contact

Cori Thunderchild, ACCESS

[cthunderchild@accessfutures.com](mailto:cthunderchild@accessfutures.com)

#201-681 Columbia Street New Westminster, BC

## Community

Urban

## Scope of Project

Local

## Target Audience

First Nations, Inuit, Métis, Youth (15-30 yrs), Adults (31-49 yrs), Older workers (50+ yrs), Other

## Initiative Impact

## What is the overall impact of the initiative and how is this measured?

To date

1393 participants in total

1276 completed

416 employed with partners

769 went onto advanced technical training

91 went back to case management

Every participant is assessed for ES skills level using the TOWES and assessed for learning and thinking abilities using Structure of Intellect system .

Assessment results are used to develop an individualized Learning Plan for each participant. The Learning Plan is used to track and measure participant progress.

Participant Essential Skills competency is measured through weekly testing. Staff work closely with participants and observe and monitor participant growth.

Participants are supported through one to one and group based instruction in accordance with their individually assessed needs

## What challenges have you faced and how were these overcome?

Participant face a number of personal challenges which can be barriers to their success. ESAF offers participant a number of practical and personal supports.

## Program Challenges

Over the years we have faced many challenges, mostly with our physical space be it construction in the building, flooding, moving and working out of a board room while all our office stuff was in storage for 3-months. We overcame by not getting caught up in the weeds of the chaos; stayed focused of the end goal and just kept on going with laughter and optimism. ESAF staff have always rolled up their sleeves and taken the tasks head on and put serving our clients in front of internal obstacles.

There is always a moment of anxiety when recruiting for programs and whether we will make our numbers and fill the class. Only once in 72 intakes did we decide to forgo the program due to insufficient interest, could have been that we were recruiting for horticulturist training (outdoor work) in January and people couldn't see past the snow and rain.

**What are 3 key lessons you learned from developing or delivering your initiative? What advice from those lessons would you share with others?**

3 Key areas of Advice:

1. Knowledgeable staff who are trained and certified in ES are key to program success
2. Don't be afraid to experiment with different programs (i.e., different trades and occupations.) Be flexible and try new things, new strategies. Switch things up. If program or strategies don't work let them go, don't be tied to them. If they do work build on them, learn from them and take these lessons into the

next program.

3. Build a knowledge base of different kinds of occupations/job and what it takes to be successful in that occupation or job. Really know the occupations you are training participants for and make sure that training curriculum reflects a sound knowledge of needed occupational skills and requirements.

## What have participants, stakeholders and partners thought, felt and/or said about your initiative?

What Students Say...

- Amber C: "I feel this program is delivered at a great pace, I enjoyed the comfortable teaching environment and the daily layout with completing the course. I was hired as a 311 intern with the City of Vancouver. Thank you all for the amazing support and encouragement."
- Brenda B "Being an adult student has its challenges but this was a fun class. I especially like the resume writing and the interview skills; this helped me so much in my approach to the actual 3-1-1 interview. All the staff here are excellent; all were helpful, informative, friendly and most excellent at their job. This place is great!"
- Davis K "ESAF changed my life I would still be staying in homeless shelters without a path to affordable wage. It has helped me not only professionally but also personally in that I gained confidence and insight on who I am what my strengths and areas of improvement are and introduced me to many people whose friendships I will cherish. Because of ACCESS, I will be working in the best job of my whole life! Thank you very much"

- Kathleen N “I am grateful for all the knowledge the staff has given me. The essential skills I developed made me more confident in my interview skills. The staff are encouraging and uplifting and made me feel welcomed and that in-itself made me successful. I learned all about my learning skills and my values and that will also allow me to continue to be successful. All the lessons learned have affected me in many ways. In work I will always strive to do my best and be professional and in life can contribute and acknowledge that I have the power over my success. The most memorable, always follow through!”
- Marcus R “It s no wonder why ACCESS is such a successful organization. They have helped so many of our people and it has made my life as well. ACCESS gave me the proper learning environment and support to succeed in the workplace. I found a sense of belonging in every interaction I had with students and staff, which has made me confident in myself and my ability to work.”
- Tuesday M “I find that this program has forever influenced my life. The teachers have been very helpful in guiding us towards our goal; I think it is amazing what they do for our people. I found that coming to this program improved so many of my skills even those that I did not know needed to be improved. I am forever thankful for what they have done for each one of us.”

#### What Employers/Partners Say

- “The City of Surrey appreciated the opportunity to work with the team at ACCESS over the past year. As a direct result of working together, we were able to identify and hire qualified applicants for several City of Surrey jobs. We look forward to enhancing our partnership going forward. Thank you ACCESS for the support you provided to the City.”

## Incorporation of Essential Skills

### Which Essential Skills are covered by the initiative?

Reading Text

Document Use

Numeracy

Writing

Oral Communications

Working with Others

Thinking Skills

Computer Use

Continuous Learning

### How are the Essential Skills integrated into your initiative?

We profile the occupation and identify what ES that are used most frequently used for that occupation and at what level of complexity. We review technical text books to identify vocabulary, foundational skills, and complexity. We interview employers and vocational instructors to identify where students/employees get stuck the most Then we weave it all together into an eight-week curriculum that emphasizes and addresses key occupational skills ,



requirements and potential challenges.

Essential skills are integrated into every component of the program including Workplace ES training, Life Skills, Career Planning, etc. Essential Skills are life skills.

## How do you assess participant Essential Skills?

ESAF uses TOWES and observation. During the Workplace ES training there are weekly exams to evaluate participant ES competence and determine if participants need extra support and tutoring.

## Project Components

### What are the components of the initiative?

Occupation-specific skills training

Academic upgrading

Work-integrated learning (i.e., internships, co-ops, work placements, etc.)

Life skills

Career and/or educational planning

Job search services

Cultural, language, and tradition awareness and/or training

## How do you support participant success in the program?

Attendance allowance

Transportation allowance

Individualized counselling

Individualized tutoring

Housing

Work related clothing/equipment

Job placements

Wage subsidies

Access to other in-house services

After program follow-up support

## How was Indigenous culture integrated into the program content or delivery?

ACCESS is an Aboriginal organization based on Aboriginal values. All ACCESS programs reflect Aboriginal perspectives and learning approaches. Learning is visual, hands-on, then to paper.

ESAF participants are all indigenous and come from different communities,

tribes and territories. They come with their own distinct culture and traditions. At ESAF we work to create community among participants. We respect and honour each other's distinct traditions and culture. As the group becomes a family they become their own culture. Each cohort works together to support each other. Often a number of the group members are entering the same vocational training institution together or are hired by the same employer and are able to continue supporting each other through this transition.

On the last day of ES training programs the group celebrates each other's culture. Throughout the program, each participant is asked to develop a cultural presentation that features their tribe, territory, history, culture and traditions. Presentations have included power points, photos, songs, clothing, crafts, etc. Participants are celebrating their culture and using all their Essential Skills in this last activity.

## What do you think are the most important competencies and attributes for staff involved in this initiative to have?

Staff require a fluid understanding of essential skills, life skills, curriculum development and facilitation. Staff need to be flexible, creative, approachable and committed to the program and the participants; staff are often asked to go above and beyond to really invest in the learners. While providing participants with support, fun and laughter they are also structured and have expectations of the participants.

As a staff we are very proud of our training space and we ensure that the facility is always clean and organized. Staff are light hearted and friendly yet structured. We are prepared to deliver a program well in advance to of student

arrival and program start dates. We do a lot of planning and always have a plan B for back-up so we can easily switch gears to accommodate changing situations. The flow of the program appears seamless to the participants because there is a great deal of planning and preparation behind the scenes. Having years of experience and a cohesive staff help us to anticipate and plan for numerous scenarios. This provides students with a secure, organized and smooth running learning environment.

## Who are your partners, and what is their involvement in the initiative?

We rely on the input from the partners be it employer or training institutions. This is where we learn what we need to teach to get the student prepared to succeed in the employment or advanced technical training. Our partners are very open to sharing materials and to learn how we work with the students. Often times the partners will come to ESAF and do presentations to the class or come sit in on various sessions and provide their input. Also they assist in bridging students from our program to their organizations/workplaces.

Here is a list of some of ESAF employer partners:

Safeway

BC Housing

BC Ferries

CN Rail

CP Rail

Pacific Ropes

VANOC Winter Olympics

Aboriginal Pavilion

Hastings Race Course  
ATIRA Property Management  
Friendship Catering  
TD Bank  
Fortis BC  
City of Surrey  
City of Vancouver  
DMH Hospitality  
Burnaby School District  
Para Space Landscaping  
Nisgaa Nation  
ACCESS Trades Dept.  
Black Tie Property Services  
Pacific Blasting and Demolition  
All West Facility Services  
Champion Window Cleaning  
Cleantech Service Group  
Can Tech Telecom Inc  
Luma Native Housing  
International Indigenous Film Festival